



**Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 8 – 10 am
Fort Fisher Recreation Area Education Room**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Division of Archives and History, Nathan Henry	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – FFRA, Alyssa Taylor	Yes
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Captain John Carty	No
Dr. Anthony Snider	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

- *Staffing News*
 - Elise Gilchrist joined the Reserve team in August as our Communications and Project Management Specialist. Elise has a Bachelor's degree in Animal Behavior. Shortly after graduating, she moved to Thailand and spent two years working as a research assistant for a non-profit organization that studies Asian elephant cognition and promotes wildlife conservation. It was through this experience that she recognized her passion for science communication. She then held a position at a marine conservation field station in Mexico working as a media and communications specialist.
 - Kate (Murray) Jones joined the Reserve in October as our Northern Sites Manager. Kate has a Bachelor's degree in Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston and a professional degree in Landscape Architecture from The University of British Columbia. She most recently worked with The Nature Conservancy in natural area management of the Nags Head Woods Preserve and served as the GIS analyst and community engagement coordinator for the NC Coastal Resilience project. Additionally, Kate has landscape design and planning experience in residential and municipal settings and currently serves on the Town of Nags Head's Planning Board.

- *NCNERR Management Plan Update*

Staff are continuing to work on the management plan update for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. NOAA is reviewing initial draft chapters of the plan as they are completed to ensure that all required elements are included per the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) management plan guidelines; approximately half of the chapters have been reviewed or are under review currently. The Reserve will then seek input on the full initial draft plan from the LACs, N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (CRC), and the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. NOAA will then review the final draft management plan for content and compliance with the NERRS management plan guidelines. A 30-day public comment period and three public meetings will be held on the final draft management plan prior to the plan's final publication. Staff are planning to review the full initial draft plan with the LACs at their spring 2017 meetings and share the plan and LAC comments on the plan with the CRC at their April 2017 meeting.

- *Budget*

- The Division of Coastal Management received \$619,322 from NOAA for operation of the NCNERR portion of the Coastal Reserve during this fiscal year, up \$24,872 from last year. The additional funds are being used to cover fixed cost increases and to fund a portion of the temporary staffing positions through the annual budget rather than relying on a variety of different funding sources that vary from year to year.
- The Division of Coastal Management's state appropriations were reduced by \$27,173 this fiscal year as required by the Department of Environmental Quality. As a result, the appropriations allocated for the Reserve program were reduced by approximately \$5,000.

- *Periodic Rules Review*

The Coastal Reserve's rules, 07O, are scheduled to be reviewed by the Rules Review Commission in June 2017 as part of the Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). Staff classified each rule citation in 07O as necessary with substantive public interest, necessary without substantive public interest, or unnecessary per G.S. 150B-21.3A (c)(1). Staff then revised the initial draft classification based on input from the LACs and the CRC supported the revised initial draft classification at its July 2016 meeting. The Department of Environmental Quality approved revised initial draft classification and the classification is currently out for public comment through November 21, 2016. As of October 21, 2016, the approximate mid-point of the public comment period, no comments had been received. After the public comment period closes, staff will compile a report for submittal to the Rules Review Commission that responds to comments received and amends the initial agency determinations if necessary. The LACs will have the opportunity to review the draft report in January 2017 prior to presentation of the report to the CRC at its February 2017 meeting. Any proposed amendments to the rule language received during the public comment period will be considered during the readoption process.

Site Update/Old Business

- *General site condition/storm report*
Park staff reported that the barrier island sustained minor erosion along the dune as a result of the storm system, winds, rain, and waves associated with the hurricane Matthew system which was followed by a higher than usual high tide associated with the October full moon. Research staff pulled the water quality sondes out of the water in preparation for the storm. No damage was done to the research infrastructure and data collection was back up and running at normal intervals and locations within days after the storm passed.
- *Work day/cleanup*
Delayed several times, a work day will be conducted early in the new year. Reserve staff and volunteers will complete a cleanup of the areas most frequently used by visitors. Parks staff and Aquarium staff are welcome to participate. Reserve staff will circulate potential dates in December.
- *Invasive plant treatment*
Also delayed several times, treatment of the white poplar stand will be revisited during the winter season.
- *Nature trail installation*
The nature trail will also be installed early in the new year. The content is developed, the markers displaying the QR codes are in hand, and the trail signs and posts are ready to go. Following installation and after the cleanup workday is completed, Reserve staff will coordinate with the Communications Specialist to do a small publicity campaign to introduce the public to this new feature.

New Business

- *Shellfish lease policy*
There is currently one shellfish lease at the site and two were permitted during 2015 at the Masonboro Island Reserve. In November of 2015, Reserve staff recommended to DMF that no further leases be considered within Reserve boundaries through December 2016. This temporary suspension was enacted to give the Reserve time to consider and evaluate how this activity and siting of leases within the boundaries interacts with the various management designations, programs, rules, and policies that affect the Reserve sites. Concerns the Reserve staff have about this activity include: the unknown ecological impacts of leases, particularly the cumulative impact of multiple leases; how these impacts may jeopardize the Reserve sites' ability to serve as "control" research and monitoring sites; the ability of other traditional users to effectively utilize the sites; and the possible impact to the recreational visitor experience. Reserve staff have since been working to develop an internal policy to describe how shellfish lease requests will be evaluated, to outline how the Reserve will work with DMF to site leases to reduce conflicts with other uses and with

ecologically sensitive resources, and to determine what thresholds may be appropriate to ensure that the natural, ambient conditions of the sites are not altered and that the research and long-term monitoring purposes of the Reserve are maintained. Staff anticipate having a final policy completed before the end of the temporary suspension at which time new proposed leases will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The committee expressed interest in learning more about the policy and this topic as things move forward.

Roundtable Discussion

- Ms. Weeks reported that the Aquarium conducted 12 canoe trips for a total of 166 participants at the site during the summer season. This is lower than in an average year, as many trips were cancelled due to windy weather not conducive to novice paddlers.
- Ms. Taylor reported that operations along the beach strand were normal and no unexpected concerns arose during the summer and early fall.
- Ms. Taylor asked about hunting regulations in the Reserve and shared an illegal hunting situation that occurred in the Bald Head Island State Natural Area in October. Discussion occurred regarding the challenges with communicating with the public and the hunting community about this activity given the complexities of property ownership and differing regulations in and around the Fort Fisher and Zeke's Island area.

Public Comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will communicate with committee members regarding the shellfish lease policy as appropriate as the Reserve staff works to manage this use.
- Reserve staff will review the draft management plan with committee members at the spring meeting.
- Reserve staff will email committee members the draft report on the periodic rules review process in January 2017.
- Reserve staff will contact committee members early in 2017 to establish dates for the 2017 meetings.